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**EPA MAKING \$1 MILLION IN GRANTS AVAILABLE TO STATES UNDER NEW
PROGRAM TO CLEANUP LEAKING GAS TANKS; MTBE SITES GIVEN PRIORITY**

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Today EPA announced grants for 10 communities in a new initiative to clean up abandoned underground petroleum tanks. The new program places special emphasis on communities with environmental problems caused by the fuel additive MTBE. Like the Agency's highly successful Brownfields' program, the new program, called USTfields, will provide grants to states for community pilot projects to plan cleanups, stop contamination of groundwater, protect public health, and allow for future economic development of the sites.

Communities in ten states are targeted to receive \$100,000 each for assessment and clean-up of these abandoned tanks. The ten communities include: Nashua, N.H.; Trenton, N.J.; Wilmington, Del.; Anderson, S.C.; Chicago, Ill.; Kansas City, Mo.; Albuquerque, N.M.; Salt Lake City, Utah; Oakland, Calif.; and Portland, Ore. EPA plans to select 40 more USTfields pilot projects in 2001. These USTfields pilots are intended to be a supplement or attachment to an existing EPA cleanup and redevelopment pilot such as a Brownfields assessment.

"The Clinton-Gore Administration today will provide the first grants for pilot projects to states and local communities to help clean up leaking underground tanks, with special emphasis on addressing MTBE contamination," said Deputy Administrator Michael McCabe. "This approach is similar to the Administration's enormously successful Brownfields program. Under that program, EPA grants have helped more than 300 communities nationwide devise their own plans to clean up contaminated sites, return those sites to productive economic use and create thousands of new jobs in the process."

Like Brownfields, an USTfields, is a site or a portion of a site that has actual or perceived contamination, as well as an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. By using federal grant money, local communities can interest developers and involved citizens in helping plan cleanups of these tanks, leverage new funds to complete the job and move on to future developments that otherwise would not have been possible. In addition to protecting public health and the environment, such actions will create new commerce, new jobs and local neighborhood improvements.

Special consideration is given in the awarding of grants to cities experiencing problems from MTBE contamination. MTBE is a fuel additive that fulfills a provision required by Congress under the Clean Air Act. A Blue Ribbon Panel assembled by EPA has determined that MTBE poses special risks to groundwater. EPA has subsequently called on Congress to eliminate MTBE from reformulated gasoline and, as a backstop measure, is also beginning regulatory action aimed at eliminating MTBE under the Toxic Substances Control Act. In the meantime, the agency is working with states and cities where MTBE has contaminated water supplies. The new USTfields program represents another step in helping address water-contamination problems arising from the use of MTBE.

Petroleum contamination is generally excluded from cleanup under EPA's Superfund and Brownfields programs due to the petroleum exemption under the Superfund law. As a result, the cleanup and redevelopment of properties containing abandoned underground storage tanks are either not occurring or are delayed. To address this impediment to cleanup and redevelopment EPA is undertaking this USTfields Initiative. Information about the USTfields Initiative is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/oust/ustfield>.